



CITY OF HOUSTON

Sylvester Turner

Mayor

P.O. Box 1562
Houston, Texas 77251-1562

Telephone – Dial 311
www.houstontx.gov

March 7, 2017

The Honorable Joan Huffman, Chair, The Honorable Bryan Hughes, Vice-Chair, and Honorable Committee Members of the Senate Committee on State Affairs:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to submit written testimony to this committee expressing my opposition, as Mayor of Houston, to Senate Bill 6. Senate Bill 6 would harm the Texas and Houston economy. It sends the wrong message to our children. It fails to enhance public safety. Finally, the Bill would usurp authority properly delegated to cities.

Last month, Houston was host to Super Bowl LI. In addition to bringing worldwide attention onto our great city, the event had a net impact of about \$350 million for the City.

If the Texas Legislature passes Senate Bill 6, it could be the last such Super Bowl we see in Houston, or in any Texas city. The National Football League issued a statement regarding SB 6 that said "If a proposal that is discriminatory or inconsistent with our values were to become law [in Texas], that would certainly be a factor considered when thinking about awarding future events."

There is good reason for the Legislature to take their threat seriously. Last year, the NCAA stripped all events from North Carolina after the state legislature passed a law bearing similarities to SB 6. The National Basketball Association pulled its All Star Game from Charlotte.

Business Insider reported in September 2016 that House Bill 2 had cost North Carolina nearly \$400 million in lost economic opportunity in just six months. According to the Governor's Office, the convention and tourism industry has a direct economic impact of \$69 billion on the state, generates more than \$6 billion in state and local tax revenues and directly or indirectly supports more than 1.1 million jobs. In times when both the state and its cities, including Houston, face difficult budgetary decisions, it is a poor choice to take action such as passage of Senate Bill 6 that harms our economy.

While we are considering the message we are sending the world, we should also be considering the message we are sending our own children. A study released last year by the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center found that 30 percent of transgender youth reported a history of at least one suicide attempt, and 42 percent reported self-injury. Additionally, 63 percent reported being bullied and 19 percent being involved in physical fights.

Senate Bill 6 will not accomplish the public safety goals it purports to address. There is no documented issue with sexual assault in public restrooms under the circumstances this bill purports to address. The State of Texas and the City of Houston have existing laws and policies that allow adequate prosecution of sexual assault wherever it occurs.

If the members of the Senate Committee on State Affairs wish to seek meaningful change to further prevent sexual assault, it could take steps to repair Texas' broken foster care system. Stories in pleadings in the *Stukenberg v. Abbott* case describe horrific sexual abuse in the Texas system. Studies across the nation have found foster children are profoundly more susceptible to sexual abuse – foster children are more than 28 times as likely to be sexually abused than the general population, according to an Indiana study.

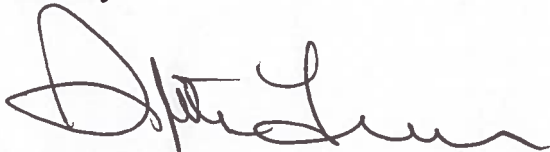
Members seeking to further efforts to prosecute sexual assault could also support efforts already underway by the Texas Attorney General to modernize protocols for sexual assault kits. Officials with the Houston Forensic Science Center have been instrumental in these efforts.

The members of the Senate Committee on State Affairs should be aware of the distinct difference between legislation like Senate Bill 6 and the now-repealed Houston Equal Rights Ordinance, especially since the ordinance has been presented as argument for passage of SB 6. The ordinance was passed in 2014 and put to a vote of the public by initiative in 2015, in which it was defeated. I will not speak for the voters of Houston in their reasoning for this decision. However, the passage and then defeat of the bill is a result of cities' ability to make decisions on these matters for themselves.

Senate Bill 6 is a mandate that prohibits cities from being able to decide on a local level whether nondiscrimination laws are appropriate for their city and what kind of laws are a best fit. Further, it is a mandate upon cities to enact certain policies regarding restrooms and other facilities that contradict with municipal policies like those of Houston that have long worked for those cities.

For these reasons, I write today in opposition of Senate Bill 6. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Sylvester Turner', with a stylized, flowing script.

Sylvester Turner
Mayor of Houston